

# As holidays loom, food banks say they have less to give as need grows

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Roman Jimenez moves boxes of donated food at the Valley Food Bank in Pacoima on Saturday, Nov. 5, 2011. (Andy Holzman/Daily News Staff Photographer)

There may be less to gobble for the poor on Thanksgiving.

Food banks across Los Angeles report soaring demand and fewer donations leading into the holiday season.

“We have a shortage of food for this time of year, more so this year than ever,” said Will Hernandez, director of Valley Food Bank in Pacoima. “We’ve got more people needing food. And we have less (food).

“So that’s a bad combination.”

The banks, which supply hundreds of food pantries that dole out free bags of dairy, produce, meat and other basics, are providers of last resort for many poor residents.

But holidays with less food on the table could be especially poignant.

The Los Angeles Regional Food Bank, which supplies

Roman Jimenez moves a box of donated food at the Valley Food Bank in Pacoima on Saturday, Nov. 5, 2011. (Andy Holzman/Daily News Staff Photographer)

600 pantries across Los Angeles County, reports a fifth less food in its larder compared with last year.

That may mean less food for the pantries, officials say.

And longer lines for recipients - with less grub in the holiday bag.

“Everybody’s feeling pinched. Everyone’s feeling the pressure. We need food,” said Michael Flood, executive director of the regional food bank.

The regional bank, which distributes about 1 million pounds of U.S. Department of Agriculture and other surplus food a week, had about 5 million pounds in its warehouse at this time last year - a record year for food distribution at 62 million pounds.

It now has 3.9 million pounds.

“The problem is, because the unemployment rate is 13 percent in L.A. County,” Flood said, “the food pantries are getting hit harder.”

The Valley Food Bank, operated by the San Fernando Valley Rescue Mission, supplies food for 15 local



Roman Jimenez moves a box of donated food at the Valley Food Bank in Pacoima on Saturday, Nov. 5, 2011. (Andy Holzman/Daily News Staff Photographer)



Betty Ramirez and Martha Morales sort food at the Valley Food Bank in Pacoima on Saturday, Nov. 5, 2011. (Andy Holzman/Daily News Staff Photographer)

side with special needs kids from the Climb Program at Village Glen School in Sherman Oaks.

Between the carefully marked racks, they loaded donations from Albertsons, Trader Joe's and Fresh Point foods into rows of plastic bins.

On the floor stood leftover bins of Halloween pumpkins. In the cooler sat 50 turkeys donated by the Morongo Indian Reservation.

"It is a rough economy," said Alec Haug, 13, of West Hills, a Village Glen School volunteer loading a box of surplus chocolate doughnuts. "People are less fortunate than us. When you know you're helping people put food on the table for Thanksgiving, it feels good."

What concerns food bank managers, however, are less-than-ample provisions.

Last year, the bank gave a pallet and a half of fresh and canned food for each food pantry pickup. It now gives the same pantries three-quarters of a pallet.

Despite incoming pallets of fresh lettuce, green beans and raspberries, many of the bins containing rice, pinto beans, mac-'n-cheese and other foodstuffs stood half empty.

And it wasn't clear whether there'd be enough turkeys this Thanksgiving

Betty Ramirez and Martha Morales sort food at the Valley Food Bank in Pacoima on Saturday, Nov. 5, 2011. (Andy Holzman/Daily News Staff Photographer) to grace every needy table.

"My need is increasing, increasing, increasing," said Valley Food Bank Manager Humberto Barba. "Right now, you can see we're a little short on food for the holidays. We need more donations, especially turkeys.

"We pray for a turkey for each family. That would be a blessing. If not ... chicken."

Workers sort food at the Valley Food Bank in Pacoima on Saturday, Nov. 5, 2011. (Andy Holzman/Daily News Staff Photographer)

pantries, who give food each week to nearly 3,500 families - or nearly 13,700 people from Newhall to North Hollywood.

That's up from serving 10,000 recipients last year, officials said.

"Definitely, the need is increasing," said Anthony Bertolino, leader of the food ministry at Leaves of Healing Tabernacle in Chatsworth, picking up a load Friday for the pantry giveaway that evening. "We get new people every week."

When the pantry opened two years ago, it helped 50 families a month. It now assists 100 families a week.

At the Valley Food Bank warehouse, a half-dozen full-time volunteers worked side by



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